

University of Nebraska: Web-based Tool to Link Social Services Nationwide

by
Amy Borgstrom
TOP Program Officer

In communities across the nation, information and referral professionals maintain data about crucial health and human services available in their communities. This results in thousands of isolated databases. This is especially problematic when databases cover only segments of services (e.g. respite care) or populations (e.g., elderly) because the very individuals and helping organizations who need the information may not know about them. When these organizations resort to maintaining their own duplicative, quickly out-dated databases these inefficiencies cost agencies and ultimately the public more to maintain than it should. Ultimately, consumers are poorly served, and do not find the services they most need.



The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center will be the lead partner in the **Bridging the Gap** project which aims to solve some of these problems. This project is designed to link health and human service information and referral systems (IRS) nationwide by developing a technological bridge between proprietary software and existing Internet XML standards. It will result in local and national resource sharing that will reduce the time consumers and case managers spend searching for sources of health and human service resources, and the time agencies spend

maintaining disparate databases. More important, the project will expand consumer choice.

The project will identify and resolve computer programming conflicts among existing IRS providers, develop standard data format structures and create data conversion rules and routines. The project will result in new software tools that will link social service resource databases through the use of a central server and a searchable web-based database.

Partners in this project include the national Alliance of IRS, INFO-LINE of Los Angeles, the Lincoln/Lancaster County Health Department, Nebraska Health and Human Services, United Way of the Midlands, Volunteers of America/Panhandle Partnership, and four software vendors.